

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6349

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: IS, RO, OVIP (BEGIN, MENAHEM)
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN: ROMANIAN VISIT

REF: (A) TEL AVIV 6279, (B) BUCHAREST 6152, (C) STATE
197194

1. DCM MET WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN EVENING AUGUST 24
FOR BRIEFING ON ROMANIA PRIOR BEGIN'S DEPARTURE TODAY
FOR BUCHAREST. ALSO PRESENT WERE DIRECTOR OF DIASPORA
AFFAIRS AVNER (WHO WILL BE ACCOMPANYING BEGIN) AND MFA
ACTING DIRECTOR OF NORTH AMERICAN AFFAIRS SECTION BAVLI.

2. BEGIN OBVIOUSLY HAS BEEN DOING HIS HOMEWORK IN
PREPARATION FOR VISIT. DURING HOUR-LONG CONVERSATION
HE SHOWED SURPRISINGLY SOPHISTICATED KNOWLEDGE OF
ROMANIAN INTERNAL SITUATION. HIS BARRAGE OF QUESTIONS
ABOUT CEAUSESCU, HIS STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES,
PERSONALITY QUIRKS AND LIKELY TACTICS DURING FORTHCOMING
CONVERSATIONS WERE CLEAR-CUT EVIDENCE THAT BEGIN IS
DETERMINED TO BE FULLY PREPARED FOR ANYTHING CEAUSESCU
MAY SERVE UP.

3. ALTHOUGH CONVERSATION TOUCHED UPON NEARLY EVERY
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TEL AV 06349 251208Z

IMPORTANT ASPECT OF ROMANIAN SCENE, ASIDE FROM CON-
SIDERABLE AMOUNT OF DISCUSSION ABOUT LEADING PERSONALI-
TIES WITH WHOM BEGIN WILL BE DEALING, TALK FOCUSED ON
TWO MAIN SUBJECTS: ROMANIAN MIDDLE EAST POLICY AND
JEWISH EMIGRATION. ON FIRST QUESTION BEGIN MADE VERY
CLEAR HE IS NOT GOING TO BUCHAREST BECAUSE HE FEELS
NEED FOR ANY LECTURES FROM CEAUSESCU ON HOW TO

SOLVE ME PROBLEM. NOR DID HE INDICATE HE HAD ANY INTENTION OF USING CEAUSESCU AS A GO-BETWEEN WITH ARAFAT. HE SAID THAT AT THE MOMENT CEAUSESCU BEGAN TO INSTRUCT HIM ON HOW TO MANAGE THE PLO PROBLEM HE WOULD ASK CEAUSESCU HOW HE WOULD HANDLE THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN ROMANIA IF IT ANNOUNCED INTENTION TO DESTROY THE ROMANIAN STATE AND LAUNCHED A NATIONAL TERRORIST CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE REGIME. HE THINKS CEAUSESCU'S RESPONSE MAY BE INSTRUCTIVE.

4. THERE WAS NO HINT THAT BEGIN INTENDS TO USE THE VISIT TO PASS ANY MESSAGES TO ANYONE. HE SPECIFICALLY RULED OUT BUCHAREST AS A CONTACT POINT FOR DEALING WITH THE SOVIETS.

5. ON THE EMIGRATION ISSUE DCM PUSHED HARD FOR A MORE ACTIVE ISRAELI POLICY WHICH WOULD SPECIFICALLY INCLUDE USE OF REPRESENTATION LISTS BY ISRAELI EMBASSY IN BUCHAREST AND FREQUENT INTERVENTION, WRITTEN OR ORAL, ON BEHALF OF APPLICANTS. DCM SAID HE HAD ADMIRATION FOR MANNER IN WHICH ISRAELIS HAD MANAGED EMIGRATION ISSUE FOR PAST 25 YEARS. FACT THAT NEARLY FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND ROMANIAN JEWS HAD GOT OUT WAS PROOF OF EFFICACY OF POLICY. BUT OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS HAD CHANGED AND HE QUESTIONED WHETHER PRESENT POLICY WAS MOST EFFECTIVE WAY OF MEETING NEW SITUATION. ROMANIANS VIEWED REMAINING

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 06349 251208Z

JEWS AS "DIMINISHING ASSET" AND WERE DETERMINED TO SQUEEZE EVERYTHING THEY COULDFROM SITUATION. IN DCM'S JUDGMENT PRESENT ISRAELI POLICY PLAYED DIRECTLY INTO ROMANIAN HANDS BECAUSE IT: 1) CLOUDED KEY ISSUE OF HOW MANY JEWS WISH TO LEAVE AND WHEN, (2 SET UP CONFRONTATION SITUATION BETWEEN AMERICAN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS, U.S. CONGRESS AND ADMINISTRATION, (3 ALLOWED ROMANIANS TO PLAY OFF AMERICANS AGAINST ISRAELIS, (4 LEFT ROMANIAN JEWS WITH NO VISIBLE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT EXCEPT FOR RABBI ROSEN, WHOSE POSITION WAS AKIN TO THAT OF A CHINESE HIGHWIRE ACROBAT CROSSING THE YELLOW RIVER ON A WINDY DAY. CONTINUING, DCM WENT INTO DETAILED ACCOUNT OF CATCH 22 SIUATION RELATING TO ROMANIAN COMPLIANCE WITH JACKSON-VANIK AMENDMENT AND ANNUAL CONGRESSIONAL REVIEW. BEGIN APPEARED WELL BRIEFED ON THIS ELEMENT OF PROBLEM AND ASKED A NUMBER OF PERTINENT QUESTIONS.

6. AT CONCLUSION THIS PORTION OF CONVERSATION PRIME MINISTER SAID HE AGREED THAT PROBLEM MERITED NEW APPROACH AND THAT HE PERSONALLY FAVORED ADOPTING POLICY ALONG LINES RECOMMENDED BY DCM. HE SAID HE

INTENDED TO DISCUSS PROBLEM "IN DEPTH" WITH CEAUSESCU AND THAT HE WOULD PUSH HARD FOR AN INFORMAL AGREEMENT WHICH WOULD LEAD TO A "MORE RATIONAL APPROACHE." HE DID NOT UNDER ESTIMATE ROMANIAN ABILITY TO EXTRACT A HIGH PRICE FOR A NEW AGREEMENT, BUT HE DID NOT INTEND TO ALLOW THIS TO INHIBIT HIS EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE IN PAST POLICIES REGULATING THIS PROBLEM.

7. COMMENT: BEGIN'S FORTHRIGHT ASSURANCES THAT HE INTENDS TO ATTEMPT TO MODIFY PAST ROMANIAN-ISRAELI PRACTICES GOVERNING EMIGRATION SHOULD BE WELCOME NEW TO THOSE WHO HAVE LABORED IN THIS BYZANTINE VINEYARD IN PAST YEARS. WHETHER HE IS ABLE TO PREVAIL OVER ROMANIANS AS WELL AS OVER ENTRENCHED INTERESTS IN ISRAEL WHO
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 TEL AV 06349 251208Z

HAVE THEIR OWN OBSCURE REASONS FOR PRESERVING STATUS QUO REMAINS TO BE SEEN. MAIN POINT SEEMS TO US THAT HE HAS COMMITTED HIMSELF TO TRY.

8. ENTIRE CONVERSATION WAS RELAXED AND INFORMAL WITH BEGIN FREQUENTLY SPINNING JEWISH JOKES AND REMINISCING. AT ONE POINT AN AIDE ENTERED ROOM WITH WHAT HE CHARACTERIZED AS AN IMPORTANT TELEGRAM FROM ISRAELI EMBASSY BUCHAREST. BEGIN READ ALOUD: "IT IS RAINING HARD HERE. BRING UMBRELLAS." WAVING THE TELEGRAM ABOUT, THE PRIME MINISTER LOUDLY PRONOUNCED THAT NO ONE IN THE PARTY SHOULD TAKE AN UMBRELLA. "ONE MAN WITH AN UMBRELLA EARLIER IN THIS CENTURY BROUGHT ENOUGH SUFFERING ON HUMANITY FOR AN ETERNITY. I SHALL GET WET RATHER THAN BE SEEN WITH AN UMBRELLA*"

9. DCM URGED THAT BEGIN FIND OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH AMBASSADOR BARNES DURING VISIT. HE PROMISED THAT HE WOULD. HE ALSO SAID HE WANTED TO SEE AMBASSADOR LEWIS AND DCM AS SOON AS HE RETURNED IN ORDER TO BRIEF US ON TRIP.

10. A FINAL NOTE. AS WE LEFT PM'S OFFICE AVNER TOOK DCM ASIDE TO EXPRESS HIS APPRECIATION FOR BRIEFING AND TO SAY WE SHOULD KNOW THAT FOR PAST YEAR OR SO ROMANIANS HAD BEEN PUSHING ISRAELIS HARD TO ADOPT CONCEPT OF REPRESENTATION LISTS. PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT HAD CONSISTENTLY REFUSED THIS ROMANIAN INITIATIVE.
LEWIS

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